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SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL AIDE ASSURES ON DELTA CRISIS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN Campbel For Reasons 1.4 A, B and D

11. (C) Summary: Presidential spokesman Femi Fani-Kayode met with Ambassador on February 28 to deliver a message from the President that the USG could be assured the hostages would be released unharmed, after which the GON intended to address the underlying socio-economic problems in the Niger Delta, while also beefing up security in the region to ensure no further incidents. The Ambassador said in addition to the Delta, the U.S was concerned about sectarian violence, the lack of preparation for elections, and the Avian Influenza epidemic. Kayode said sectarian violence was being deliberately stirred up for political purposes, and those doing it would either give up or be stopped. On AI, the President was personally engaged and the GON was doing its best given limited resources. While saying the President had not made up his mind, Kayode strongly defended a third term, saying no other leader could maintain Nigeria's stability. End Summary.

Assurances on the Delta

12. (SBU) On February 28, Special Advisor on Public Affairs Femi Fani-Kayode met with the Ambassador to deliver a message from the President regarding the hostage crisis in the Niger Delta. He said that we could be certain no one would be killed and the hostages would be released unharmed. The GON was doing everything possible to assure their immediate release. The military could have stormed the place, but decided not to risk casualties. He said the Hostages should be released within 24 hours. He then asked if we had heard that before, and the Ambassador said we had. Kayode, said this time it was said with "great confidence." Once the immediate crisis was resolved, the real issue was what to do in the Delta. The President had decided to put in place social and economic remedies to address the underlying causes of what was criminal activity. He also would put in place the security machinery to prevent another hostage crisis.

13. (C) The Ambassador asked whether this would be where the UK security services company Saladin came in. The response was that Saladin, or others, would have at most an advisory role. Time would be needed to allow the socio-economic measures to take root, but security would need to be beefed up at the same time. Recommendations were before the National Security Advisor Aliyu, the Chief of Defense Staff Ogumudia and the Director General of State Security Services Kayode Are. In fact, steps had already been taken to improve security, and without them the situation could have been

worse. There would be no kid glove treatment, since the militia were using the economic problems of the region as an excuse for criminal behavior. The Ambassador noted the political goals, but Kayode dismissed this as further gloss to give the militias respectability. All they wanted, he claimed, was to be left in peace to carry out lucrative oil theft. Whether criminal or political, however, the GON would address the problem. Kayode welcomed any U.S. advice or assistance in this area, noting that U.S. vital interests were of paramount importance to the GON. The Ambassador noted that if Nigeria hoped to meet its goal of 4 million bpd of oil production additional investment must be attracted to the Delta.

Other Concerns

15. (C) Kayode asked whether the U.S. was satisfied with the situation in Nigeria aside from the Delta crisis. The Ambassador said there were several concerns including sectarian violence, the lack of preparation for elections, including slow movement on key legislation and no release of funds to the election commission, and Avian Influenza. Kayode agreed that sectarian violence was a real concern. People were taking advantage of existing tensions to foment unrest for political reasons. The government knew who was behind it and why, but felt it was on top of the situation. Those funding demonstrations would see that they were failing and give up. If not, the GON would "take them out," it would not allow a blood bath. Only President Obasanjo, he opined, could manage the current tensions in Nigeria.

16. (U) On AI, Kayode noted the President was personally involved and being briefed daily, and the GON was doing the

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best it could given its limited resources. The Ambassador said we had noticed that and it was rare to see such high level involvement but that the USG was concerned about surveillance and spotting human cases, and is working with the GON and WHO to help with this. We were also concerned about the economic and nutritional impact. Kayode agreed this needed more attention.

Third Term

17. (C) The Ambassador noted the U.S supported term limits, and believed it opened the political process and promoted democracy. President Obasanjo had relinquished office in the 1970s and had a chance to repeat the act and go down in Nigeria history, much like President Washington who declined a third term, though many pressed him to stay on. Kayode countered by citing Roosevelt who stayed for a third term when the country faced critical challenges. Climbing on a soap box, he said it would not be right to deny Nigerians the right to write their own constitution. If the National Assembly, elected by the people, wanted to amend the constitution they must consider it. If in that case the President chose to run again, those who opposed a third term could support another candidate. It was a rigorous process*both the national assembly and two thirds of states must approve an amendment. It could not be accomplished with bribery; the President would never bribe anyone, anyway. Then it would all be up to the elections.

18. (SBU) The DCM noted that Roosevelt's third term, in fact led the U.S. to amend the constitution to prohibit it. Kayode then gave a list of leaders, Lee in Singapore, Mathahir in Malaysia, and Ataturk in Turkey, who remained in power to the great benefit of their countries. Obasanjo had a duty to remain, especially as he was completely selfless and completely honest. No one who opposed him alleged he was corrupt, but were just annoyed that he did not open the treasury to them.

¶9. (C) Comment: Kayode's comment about strengthening security in the Delta hints that a military solution is in the making. Regarding the aftermath, despite the rhetoric and increased concern, it appears the GON is more interested in tinkering at the margins of the economic and social problems in the Delta, rather than addressing the root causes of its problems. Unwilling to acknowledge a real political element to the current dissent, the government appears to prefer the carrot and stick combination of a few economic concessions and an increased security presence, hoping to keep the Delta in a low simmer and maintain the status quo.

¶10. (C) While we agree that the sectarian violence has a strong political element, where Kayode sees only political manipulations we believe it reflects genuine popular unhappiness with a third term. We doubt it will just go away, which raises the uncomfortable specter of Kayode's threat that those "behind it" will be "taken out." If the line in the Villa is that only Obasanjo can contain the seething tensions in Nigeria, then unrest may only bolster the determination and self-justification for a third term.
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